

March 2010

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USS NASSAU (LHA 4) THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"

Gator Times



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Joins 5th Fleet*



Gator Times



30 years
LHA 4

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GatorTimes

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On The Cover:
USS Nassau travels down the Suez Canal beyond the Friendship Bridge spanning Israel and Egypt.
Photo by MC2 Patrick Gordon.

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Greetings Shipmates, Families and Friends, Nassau is three months into her 2010 deployment and has been on station in the 5th Fleet area of responsibility for most of March. We continue to answer the call and meet all operational expectations.

The Navy/Marine Corps Society's 2010 Active-Duty Campaign runs through March and Nassau's Sailors and Marines have raised money in a number of ways, including a Pie in the Face event, raffles and generous donations. Halfway through the campaign we've nearly reached our goal and have every expectation of exceeding it.

Nassau recently had a Morale Day, giving the crew a chance to take a few hours off and enjoy a Steel Beach Picnic. During the picnic the crew also enjoyed one of the few exceptions to the Navy's prohibition on alcohol aboard ship – a Beer Day. By tradition, after 45 consecutive days at sea, but not within five days of reaching a port, I can authorize two beers for each crew member of legal drinking age.

Life at sea is arduous and events like these help relieve the monotony of day-to-day operations. Another program we'll soon implement is Liberty at Sea. It will offer each member of the crew a quality day off while underway. That day he or she will be duty-free,

Captain's Call

Capt. Ronald Reis
Commanding Officer
USS Nassau (LHA 4)



can sleep in, not shave, and shop in the ship's store during special hours, among other privileges.

Finally, I want to say again how much I appreciate not only the efforts of the Sailors and Marines aboard this ship, but also the sacrifices made by Nassau's Family and Friends at home. Without your support we couldn't do our jobs and protect our nation.

Until next time stay motivated and remember to motivate those around you!

CMC Corner



Shipmates, and Nassau Family and Friends, It's hard to believe two months have already passed. We've finally settled into a routine after transiting the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. Nassau's Sailors and Marines have been working very hard and I'm proud to see their enthusiasm on a daily basis. It's what keeps me going and motivated!

February and March were busy for many of our Sailors, especially those going up for advancement. It was great seeing the number of Sailors who attended the ship's Junior Enlisted Training Team daily and studied in preparation for their advancement exams. I wish all the best of luck and I look forward to seeing the results in June.

Although we've been working hard, the crew managed to fit in a bit of relaxation time on March 20

with a command Morale Day. It included a Steel Beach Picnic and a traditional Navy Beer day. The day was very well-deserved and everyone enjoyed the chance to step back from work and enjoy some fresh air.

To our Families and Friends, I'd like to thank you for all the support you give your Sailors and the Command as a whole. It's a pleasure to see the tons of care packages arrive every mail call and the smiles on the crew's faces. It doesn't seem to matter the size or content of the package, the smile is always the same. It's the little things that matter the most when deployed.

In closing, I appreciate all the hard work and dedication from our Sailors and warm thoughts and prayers from our Family and Friends.

Until next time, take care and God Bless.

Sailor Receives Letters From Missouri Middle School



HM1(SW) Jonathan M. Knotts displays several letters that arrived from a seventh grade class in Steelville, Mo. Knotts received the mail from a teacher who is a student of his Father's.

Photo by MC3 Desiree Green

By MC3 Desiree Green
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Students from Steelville Middle School in Steelville, Mo., recently offered their support to the Marines and Sailors deployed aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4). Several letters addressed "Dear Sailor/Marine" came to Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (SW) Jonathan M. Knotts from a class of seventh graders.

"My Father is a professor at Underwood University and he teaches a teacher improvement class. When the teacher got word that I was in the Navy and was heading to Haiti to assist in the earthquake relief efforts, she wanted to get her students involved," said Knotts.

"The students' target audience was service men and women who do not receive mail and especially those who helped with Haiti," said Knotts.

Nassau Amphibious Ready Group in combination with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (NAS ARG/24 MEU) departed its homeport of Norfolk, Va., Jan 18 on a regularly scheduled deployment but was soon diverted to the Caribbean Sea to support Operation Unified Response, the humanitarian aid and disaster response mission to Haiti.

"When I told my 7th grade Social Studies classes about Nassau and its mission in Haiti, they were hooked," said teacher Jennifer Whitson.

"Then, when I told them there were some Sailors and Marines who go without mail they jumped at the opportunity to reach out to them. They are great kids! If we could harness their energy we could power a ship for a week," she said.

"The seventh graders love to write letters to our military. They understand that you all have important jobs to do and are busy," said Whitson. "They write just to support."

In one of the letters, a 13-year-old student said the person reading the letter should always know he or she has family.

"The student wrote 'All military are seen as family here,'" said Whitson.

Since receiving the letters Knotts has been busy trying to match each student with a pen pal or mentor. Some of the letters had notes attached with special requests and comments from the teacher.

Knotts said if Sailors and Marines wanted they could match a particular person to these students by what was written on the note.

"This is a great opportunity to make a positive impact on students who hold the military in very high regard. This experience is going to influence them for good," Knotts said.

The Sailors aboard Landing Craft Unit 1645 immediately reached back to the students.

"We figured instead of just each of us picking one student we would sponsor all of them as a pen pal. We are sending them a photo of us and keeping them in the loop of how we are doing throughout deployment," said Boatswain's Mate 1st Class (SW) Robert Dillard from Washington D.C.

In addition to the letters, students raised \$600 for UNICEF and also participated in Convoy of Hope which consisted of collecting hygiene kits.

"Steelville is a little town approximately 90 miles

See "Letters," page 10

Nassau Medical Keeps Crew Healthy

By MCSN Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

On Feb. 9, USS Nassau (LHA 4) pulled out of Haiti after successful operations in support of Operation Unified Response. As the ship's Medical Department recovers from the many functions it was responsible for in Haiti, Nassau's Hospital Corpsmen prepare for the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility.

While deployed, the Medical Department's main focus areas include preparing the crew with immunizations, physical examinations, medical health training, and overall safety.

"During this deployment, we want to promote health and wellness and give our Sailors all the medical needs they require," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (SW/AW) Jennifer Tillard of Norfolk, Va.

Although Haiti was a diversion from Nassau's scheduled deployment, Tillard said it was an eye opener for the medical staff and also a chance to prepare for the Middle East.

"I was really surprised to find out we were prepared for a mission like Haiti," said Tillard. "I feel more comfortable going into the 5th and 6th Fleets because of all the things we accomplished in Haiti. My junior Sailors especially took it very seriously. All of us came together as a team and I feel that's what we're going to do throughout the rest of this deployment."

One of the most junior medical personnel to join the Nassau team, Hospitalman Michael Conley of St. Louis, Mo., said that even though this is his first deployment, Nassau seems to be prepared for the 5th and 6th Fleets.

"We weren't expecting to go to Haiti," said Conley.

"But we did continuous training with the crew to make the mission a success. As such, we'll continue to train and promote a healthy lifestyle while making



HN Michael Conley of St. Louis, Mo., administers a shot to a Sailor aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4). Nassau's medical department's main focus while deployed includes preparing the crew with immunizations, physical evaluations, health training and overall safety.

Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

our way to the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf."

Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/AW/FMF) Scott Radke of Virginia Beach, Va., said the training his department provides proved highly effective.

"All of our training was put to use," said Radke. "Now that we're back on track, the health and safety of the crew are our main concerns. From preventative medicine to preparatory health to safety and, of course, training, the Sailors and Marines aboard Nassau will be medically ready for whatever 5th and 6th Fleets have to offer."

Nassau is currently deployed as part of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group/24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (NAS ARG/24 MEU) in support of Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and Theater Security Operations (TSC) efforts. The NAS ARG/24 MEU is comprised of embarked Marines from the 24 MEU, the amphibious assault ship USS Nassau, the amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) and the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48).

Suez Canal Transit

Photo by MC2 Patrick Gordon



Photo by MC3 Desiree Green



Photo by MC3 Desiree Green



Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson



Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

E-Division Keeps the Light On

By MC3 Desiree Green
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Down in the depths of a Navy ship, the heat is unbearable. Sweat rolls and the air seems to smother as these machines hold the key to making the old girl fire up and go.

Nestled off the hangar bay of the USS Nassau (LHA 4) is the office for the Electrical Division, or E Division. The customer service window is constantly buzzing with Sailor's requesting assistance. This shop is responsible for making sure that all electrical equipment is running properly on the entire ship.

"On the whole, we work 16 hours a day in very uncomfortable conditions," said Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Josh A. Dean of Sebring, Ohio.

"Watchstanders work 18 hour days," Dean continued. "Six on watch, six working, and six in your rack. It is a constant rotation."

In addition to the electrician watches, they fill in for other Engineering watches.

"The Machinist Mates are under-manned, so we help them out whenever we can," said Dean.

"Our division is the only one that stands all of the Engineering departments watches," Dean said. "We are very versatile."

These Sailors are the first ones onboard and the last to leave. Their liberty is secured between 48-72 hours prior to getting underway.

The Sailors of E Division have built a brotherhood and are extremely positive and hard working, Dean said.

"Camaraderie is great! We laugh, and play jokes. We are like one big family," said Dean.

E Division's officer in charge, Ensign Craig T. Lensgrav recognizes the crew's hard work.

"I envy them. I was prior enlisted and sometimes I wish that I could get out there and help them," said Lensgrav. "They work hard and truly earn their paychecks. I think it's exciting that they are being highlighted because we lay in the shadows and we do a lot for the ship."

The crew remained humble about being put in the spotlight. When asked how they felt about it, young newcomer Electrician's Mate Fireman Recruit Jacob A. Buckelew rang out in a thick Memphis, Tenn.,



EM3 Jesse K. Tomlin of Hopewell, Va., repairs an electrical socket aboard the USS Nassau (LHA 4). Tomlin works in the ship's Electrical Division, which is responsible for making sure all electrical equipment aboard the ship is running properly.

Photo by MC3 Desiree Green

drawl.

"It's good to get recognition but we don't work hard to get recognition. We work hard because it's our job," said Buckelew.

Stunned by his very articulate answer the room fell silent as they all just stared at him. Buckelew smiled, "What?" and the shop burst into laughter.

"Get your boots on," said one of the crew, "It's getting deep in here!"

Second Class/Sergeant Association Approved Aboard USS Nassau

By MCSN Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

A group of second class petty officers and Marine sergeants aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) have banded together to create a Second Class Sergeant Association (SCSA).

The goal of the SCSA is to help build newer service members into well-respected Sailors and Marines by making sure they have proper military bearing, pride in their job, and satisfaction in everything that they do. This ensures that there are Sailors and Marines with full leadership sea bags ready to take the place of their superiors.

The SCSA also plans to team up with Marine sergeants, Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) and the First Class Petty Officer Association (FCPOA) to sponsor events and take some of their responsibilities creating a fair ship-board environment for all.

Culinary Specialist 2nd Class (SW) Micah Lee, the SCSA president, said that, while the association is newly formed, the idea had been bouncing around for a long time.

"I found out awhile ago that a few Sailors wanted to get something started," said Lee. "Master at Arms 2nd Class (SW/AW) Michael Sanders tried two years ago to get one going, but he didn't get too much support from the senior leadership. Now, however, it's a different story."

"A couple months ago a few highly motivated second classes such as Lee, MA2 (SW/AW) Andre Geter, Logistics Specialist 2nd Class (SW) Ravinesh Prasad and I began to seriously talk about it," said

Sanders. "We sent out emails to all the second classes, arranged meetings with the first classes, and waited for only a handful of petty officers to show up. We filled an entire section of the mess decks, however, and talk has turned into action."

Like the FCPOA, the SCSA will also prove to be a significant association in the eyes of the fleet by

providing a sense of direction and morale to their juniors.

"This association is important because we're putting ourselves into a middle management atmosphere and training Sailors with it," said Lee. "I believe we can get so much accomplished because it starts with us, moves on to other ships, then the entire Navy and from there – the world."

"We're putting this association together because it will help take stress off our senior leadership," said Sanders. "Seasoned first classes learn how to groom their troops and accept feedback from their second classes. They will eventually take the seat as the Navy's next Chiefs and the process makes it harder for the junior Sail-

ors to relate to them. As a second class though, it's that much easier to relate to the junior guys and provide mentorship."

Though the SCSA is still new, Lee said there is plenty of motivation quickly making these dreams a reality.

"A lot of Sailors, as well as Marines, are very supportive of what we're trying to accomplish," said Lee. "They like the idea that it's not about us. It's about you."



Graphic by MCSN Chris Williamson

Nassau Idol a Ship Favorite

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau (LHA 4) recently held its first Nassau Idol singing competition sponsored by the ship's Morale Welfare and Recreation Division (MWR).

Three auditions took place in February, with contestants performing their songs over Nassau's Shipboard Information Training Entertainment (SITE) system. The Sailors and Marines aboard Nassau voted for their favorites via e-mail, narrowing the field to seven finalists who performed Feb. 27.

Logistics Specialist 3rd Class (SW) Jorge Resto from San Juan, Puerto Rico, took first place with his medley of contemporary R&B songs by recording artist Trey Songz.

"I used to play a lot of instruments when I lived in Puerto Rico, but I didn't know

I could sing until I came to Nassau," Resto said. "I would sing a lot when I worked and people would come up and tell me I had a nice voice."

Resto won a portable music player dock and \$30 worth of phone cards.

The second place winner, Aerographer's Mate Airman Apprentice Logan Vath from Scottsbluff, Neb., left with a brand new watch. His rendition of the Grateful Dead song "Fire on the Mountain" caused a close decision decided by the crowd.

"The competition was tough," Vath said. "I knew the decision would be close, but I had fun. I enjoyed the first place guy and his ability to move the crowd."

Nassau Idol is scheduled to start up again in April.

"Expect a lot more fun events from MWR this deployment," Fiske said.



AGAA Logan Vath from Scottsbluff, Neb., waits for the audience's reply as he gets the crowd involved in the Grateful Dead song "Fire on the Mountain" during USS Nassau's (LHA 4) first Nassau Idol competition. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau.



AOAN Stephen Stone from Chicago belts out the gospel song "His Eye is on the Sparrow" during USS Nassau's (LHA 4) first Nassau Idol competition. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau.

Nassau Earns Battle Effectiveness Award for Third Consecutive Year

By MC2 Patrick Gordon
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Commander, Naval Surface Forces (SURFOR) awarded the crew of USS Nassau (LHA 4) with the Battle Effectiveness (Battle "E") award for 2009 on Feb. 10.

The Battle "E" recognizes ships and crews around the fleet who present the maximum condition of departmental readiness in their group and their capability to perform wartime tasks. It is Nassau's third consecutive award.

Ships in a squadron or group contend against one another to prove their operational proficiency in the fields of maritime warfare; engineering and survivability; command, control, communications and information warfare; logistics management; and overall shipboard safety.

Eligibility for the award demands proven day-to-day excellence in addition to superior achievement during certifications and qualifications conducted throughout the calendar year.

"Earning this award is a true testament to the crew itself," said Commanding Officer of USS Nassau, Capt. Ronald Reis. "It really speaks of sustained excellence. To win the Battle 'E' three years in a row means that the ship did extremely well."

From every echelon of the ship's chain of command, praise for the crew and their efforts spoke volumes to the hard work and dedication that was necessary to earn this award.

"I am definitely proud of the crew and their effort over the past year," said Nassau Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Stanley Kopiczak. "Every department is responsible for this Battle 'E.'"

Kopiczak said he's confident of Nassau's chances at winning the award next year.

"We have the most motivated crew on the waterfront and I think we can absolutely win this award

again next year," said Kopiczak.

Junior enlisted Sailors also said they feel the pride of being recognized for all the hard work over the past year that made earning the Battle "E" possible.

"It makes me feel proud," said Electronics Technician 3rd Class Christine Duncan of Richmond, Va. "It feels really good to be apart of such a hard working team."

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(TSC) efforts in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. The NAS ARG/24 MEU is comprised of embarked Marines from the 24 MEU, the amphibious assault

ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), the amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19), and the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48).



"Letters," from page 3

South West of St. Louis, Mo.," said Whitson. "The families here are pretty low income, but what they lack in finances is made up in heart and soul. We don't have much, but we share what we do have."

NAS/ARG/24 MEU left Haiti on Feb. 7 and is currently in the 5th Fleet area of responsibility. NAS ARG is comprised of ships from Amphibious Squadron Eight (PHIBRON 8) including the Tarawa-class multipurpose amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) and the Whidbey Island-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48). Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) complete the group.

COMMAND ACHIEVEMENTS



ESWS Qualified :

AC1 Hector Mercado	EM3 George Sahyoun
AC2 Daniel Catalan	YN2 Crystal Bowyer
AC2 Rafael Babilonia	QM2 Daniel Gutierrez
AC2 Roberto Meneses	DC3 Forrest Klitz
OS3 Christopher Collins	MMFN Troy Scott
ET3 Justin Page	HT2 Ryan Visago
ET3 Richard Wolsifer	IT2 Tammy Pinkard
CTTSN Bianca Castellon	AO2 Amy Westerhausen
OS2 Jonathan Mcelyea	AO2 Nickalous Burgess
CTT2 Brandon Allen	AO3 Christopher Bowman
AC1 Jose Garza	AO3 Sherwin Mendoza
AC1 Brian Sawitski	SN Anthony Brown

ABHAR Hannibal Johnson-Bey



EAWS Qualified :

OS2 Anthony Ford	ET1 John Gloo
EN1 Johnnie Lowery	AC2 Leon Hunter
AG1 Chellene Rose	AC3 Eric Williams
EMFN Shawn Gordy	IT2 Ryan McDowell
ABHAN Elliott Sipe	MM2 Scottie Ryder
ABHAN William Hallowell	OS2 Justin Oliver
ABHAN Eric Smith	ABHAN Scott Yurek

ABHAN Trevor Mineo

A Word From the Ombudsman

Greetings from your Nassau Command Ombudsmen.

Please encourage those at home to get out and enjoy the weather and local events this spring.

April is the Month of the Military Child, which recognizes the sacrifices that our children make on a daily basis while our military members are serving our country. Please make a special effort to acknowledge your wonderful, resilient military children.

The Nassau Family Readiness Group (NFRG) has many children's events planned. The group has finalized plans for a children's halfway party at Hunt Club Farm from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on May 8. There will be pony rides, a jump house, a petting zoo, and

more. NFRG is also planning a special halfway party for adults - a sunset dinner cruise aboard the Spirit of Norfolk from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on May 16.

The group is asking new or expecting moms for contact information for invitations to the NFRG baby shower.

Finally, NFRG is holding a t-shirt design contest for a deployment t-shirt. Please submit entries by email to nfrghomecoming@yahoo.com.

As always, Nassau's Ombudsmen are available any time to help your families while you are deployed. Rest well knowing the Ombudsmen and the NFRG supports, encourages and assists the Nassau Family.